

2013 Human Resource Management on Wisconsin Farms

FARM Team

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Farm Employee Characteristics

Trisha Wagner, Ken Barnett, Jennifer Blazek, and Jenny Vanderlin¹

Employee Characteristics

Questions in this section of the survey pertained to the number and type of farm employees hired. Survey respondents reported on a total of 1,903 employees. Many farms hired a mix of employees with different background characteristics. Eighteen percent of the employees reported were immediate family members (children, siblings, parents, grandparents). Farms that reported hiring an immediate family member (n=150) had an average of two employees. Four percent of hires were non-family teenagers (13-17 years). Farms that reported hiring a non-family teenager (n=55) had an average of one employee. Twenty-nine percent of the employees were non-family adults (18 years and older). Farms reporting a non-family adult (n=148) had an average of four employees. Forty-nine percent of the employees were non-family immigrant hires. Farms that reported hiring a non-family immigrant (n=118) had an average of eight employees.

Employee Education Level

Farm employers responded to a number of questions with regard to farm employee education level. The majority of farm employees in the study had a high school level education (42% of employees). Twenty-two percent of farm employees had less than a high school level education, and another 22% had an unknown level of education. Only 13% had some college, 2-year, or 4-year college degree.

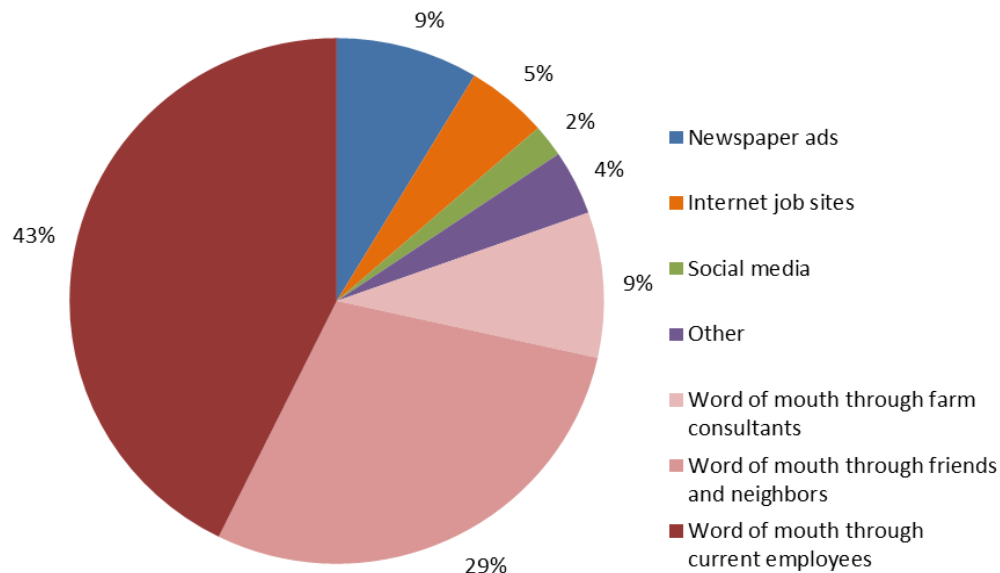
Employee Recruitment

On average, farms in the survey hired three new, non-family employees in the last year. Most farms (Figure 1), eighty-one percent, recruited new employees through word of mouth of current employees (43 percent), or friends, neighbors (29 percent), and consultants (9 percent). Far fewer farms recruit through newspaper advertisement (9 percent), and internet job sites (5 percent), or social media (2 percent) for new employees. Other recruiting methods listed included using Craig's List, or hiring people who came to the farm looking for employment.

More than 76,400 people make their living each year as employees on Wisconsin farms. Their educational background and other skills and characteristics vary widely. Both employees and farmers want to be informed about how farm labor is recruited, and what their most valuable characteristics are.

To assist them, the University of Wisconsin-Extension (UWEX) FARM Team conducted a survey of Wisconsin farms. UWEX Agriculture Agents submitted the contact information for 417 farms from 38 counties around the state. Some agents sent the survey directly to producers in their county or included the survey in a newsletter. There was also an on-line option for completing the survey. A total of 220 producers from 38 counties completed the survey. The survey was conducted from late January to mid-April 2013.

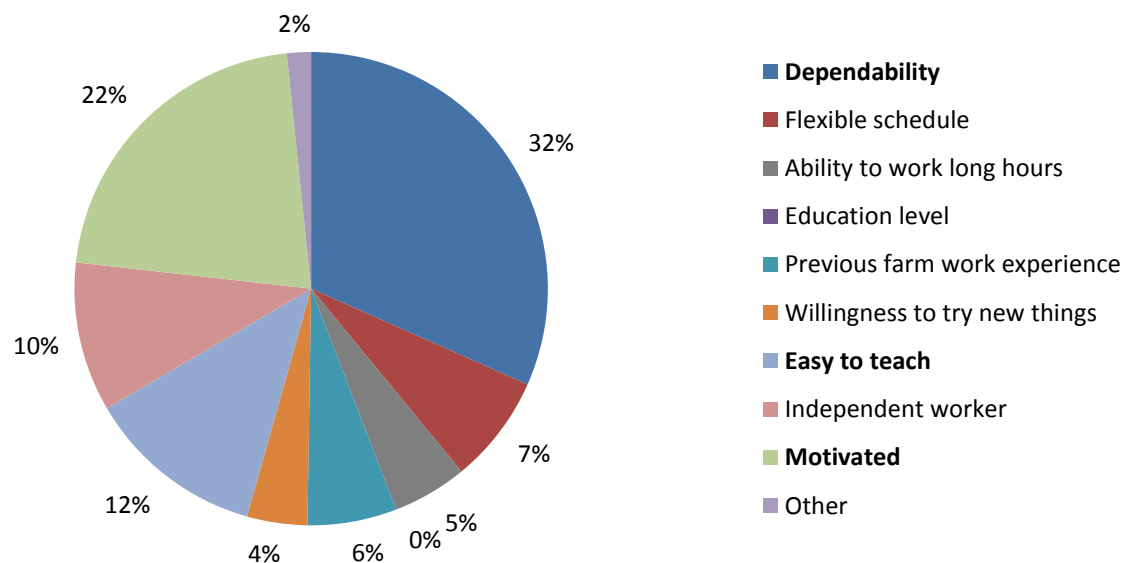
Figure 1. How Do You Recruit New Employees?



Employee Attributes

Respondents were asked to rank the three most important attributes in an employee. The majority ranked dependability and motivation as the most important characteristics, with “easy to teach” and “independent worker” listed as distance third and fourth important attributes (Figure 2). Things such as previous farm work experience, education level, flexible schedule, and ability to work long hours or try new things were far less important to survey respondents. Other important characteristics listed included honesty, attitude, ability to work well with others, listening to instructions, and “good with cows”.

Figure 2. What are the Important Characteristics of an Employee?



Conclusions

Many farms hire a mix of employees with different background characteristics such as immediate family members, non-family teenagers and/or adults, and immigrant employees. Almost half of the employees in the study had a high school education, while 22% had less than high school, and another 22% had an unknown level of education.

Eighty-one percent of farms in the survey recruit employees via word of mouth, of current employees (43 percent), or friends, neighbors (29 percent), and consultants (9 percent). There are many characteristics which a farm employer considers to be important in an employee. The three most important were dependability, easy to teach, and motivated.

¹ Trisha Wagner is the Agriculture Agent for Jackson County University of Wisconsin – Extension; Ken Barnett, Extension Educator for University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Dairy Profitability and lead author of this paper; Jennifer Blazek, Agriculture Agent for Polk County University of Wisconsin –Extension; and Jenny Vanderlin, Assistant Director for University of Wisconsin -Madison Center for Dairy Profitability. All are members of the Human Resource Management Workgroup, FARM Team, University of Wisconsin-Extension.

This series of papers is a product of the Human Resource Management Workgroup of the FARM (Farm and Risk Management) Team of the University of Wisconsin – Cooperative Extension.

For further information on the content of this paper or others in the series, contact:

Trisha Wagner at 715-284-4257 or trisha.wagner@ces.uwex.edu

FARM Team Website: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/farmteam/>

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